

"NEZUMI KOZO NITAI" (Nezumi Kozo the 2nd)

S Y N O P S I S

In the later days of Tokugawa Period there lived in a narrow lane in Kanda, Yedo, an artisan making tubs, whose name was Kyushichi. He was lame and was blind in one eye, but he was liked by his neighbors as he was of an amiable disposition and kind-hearted, and any petty trouble or dispute that arose in his neighborhood was settled amicably when he played a role of mediator.

In those days there were frequent cases of burglary in mansions of daimyos in the town. The officials kept it secret, fearing that the reputation of daimyos might be impaired, but the rumor spread that it was an act of a burglar assuming the name of Nezumi Kozo who had won the name of the benevolent picaroon in the early years of Tempo Era.

A man called Sampei who lived near by called on Kyushichi and told him that a burglar had broken into the mansion of Wakizaka the previous night. Sampei had been a detective before but gave that that profession, getting sick of the job. Talking of the burglary, Sampei shifted to the narrative of his experiences handling criminals. He said there are incorrigible rascals among robbers, but that they became such under various circumstances which are attributable to the fault of society. He further said that he had worked once for Torii and his party and apprehended a group of those who were working for the opening of the country to foreign intercourse, but that being convinced of their guiltlessness he regretted his act and gave up his profession.

That night, the mansion of Tanuma, a high government official, was broken into by burglar. The burglar appeared at the house of the tub-maker Kyushichi, and it was a great wonder why he did so. But in reality it was no wonder, for the tub-maker Kyushichi was none other than Nezumi Kozo Jirokichi, the benvolent picaroon. That night, having finished his job he was resuming his role of Kyushichi, the tub-maker, when he found a fair visitor waiting for his return. Kyushichi got alarmed, fearing his falsehood had been detected, and was about to stab her to death. But the girl sat calm beneath his blade, for she was blind.

Her name was Oshima and she was a younger sister of Chomatsu who was a friend of Kyushichi's during his childhood. Chomatsu, when working together with Jirokichi (Kyushichi) a few years before, attempted to break into a mansion of a daimyo in a western province and was arrested. He was then imprisoned and sentenced to death. He met his death penalty without disclosing that he was an accomplice of Jirokichi, true to his promise made to the latter. Now his younger sister called on Jirokichi, journeying all the way from the province of Kazusa, not knowing that her brother had been killed in prison and believing in her brother.

Garrulous wives in the neighborhood talked much about the appearance of the fair maiden in Kyushichi's home. Living together with Oshima, Kyushichi found it difficult to go out during the night as hitherto. Oshima's blindness was due to mal-nutrition and to nervous prostration. Kyushichi had her receive medical treatment. The physician told her that she could restore her sight if properly treated, which gave her much encouragement and joy. She told this to Jirokichi (Kyushichi) who, however, got

flurried, for when she was cured she would get aware of his secret, though he wished for the happiness she would enjoy from the restoration of her sight. He was thrown into a dilemma. He thought of taking that opportunity to turn over a new leaf and return to an honest living after abandoning his burglary profession. He had once donated some money, without disclosing his name, to rescue a girl named Oato who was enslaved in a house of ill fame. As the money had certain engravings suspicion arose and a bath-house man named Gensuke who was partly working as a detective called at Jirokichi's house and made a search, but failed to find any evidence. Jirokichi thought of fleeing somewhere, taking Oshima with him.

It happened one day that a Confusian scholar named Onken was arrested by Gensuke on a charge of libelling the government. His daughter asked Jirokichi for help. She told him that her father simply said: "We are annoyed by the way of to-day's government." This was overheard by Gensuke who immediately apprehended Onken. Jirokichi's blood burned with just indignation.

That night the mansion of Torii, lord of Kai Province, was broken into. The burglar made one mistake. He left behind an article that served as evidence. A strict search was instituted. Oshima who believed in Jirokichi got gradually attached to him. She was determined to devote herself to him who was lame. She had her sight restored to such a degree that she could see though still dimly. Her joy knew no bounds, but by this time Jirokichi was in the hands of Gensuke. He knew that he could not escape his fate, but he did not like Oshima to get aware that he as well as her brother were criminals. Oshima knew that Jirokichi loved

her. Jiromichi freed himself from Gensuke and threw himself into the hands of Sampei and got arrested. Oshima, before whom the world was now light, found Jirokichi arrested but saw him led away, feigning blindness and cherishing her dear sentiment in her bosom.

Toho Co.,
Presented by Chiezo Kakao
Ka & Kogiku Ha
naya
Date: ~~March~~ April 13
to May 4

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AUTHOR'S INTENTIONS

Even in the years of Tokugawa Period when the feudal government ruled there was a popular voice. In the later years of the Tokugawa Shogunate there were ⁿstruggles for political power, and many were sacrificed for the fulfilment of ambitions of a few.

Voices of popular protest against despotism had their expression in the people's admiration for the benevolent picaroon Nezumi Kozo Jirokichi.

The militaristic and despotic rule that oppresses the people is destined to ruin and the government that is rooted in universal love should take its place. Such is the hope and expectation of the author in producing this play.

Note: The popularity of the so-called burglary dramas that was in evidence during the early days of the Meiji Era was due to the satisfaction of people's curiosity and nothing more. Reproval of vice and promotion of virtue was a moral lesson embodied in some of such plays, but it was merely ideological and nothing better than feudalistic Confucian idea. Guarding against such "curiosity only" principle the author aspires to make the dramatic characters as realistic as possible by converting the heroic persons into plain citizens.